A

SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF BRISTOL,

ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 1790,

BEING

THE ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION OF EDWARD COLSTON, ESQ.

Publiſhed at the Requeſt of the PRESIDENT and MEMBERS of the DOLPHIN SOCIETY in BRISTOL.

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TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

HENRY, Lord MIDDLETON,

THIS DISCOURSE

(PREACHED BY THE APPOINTMENT OF HIS LORDSHIP,
AND OF MRS. SOPHIA COLSTON, LATELY DECEASED)

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY

HIS LORDSHIP's

MOST OBEDIENT,

HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

A

SERMON.

ECCLESIASTICUS, XLIV. 10, 15.

THESE WERE MERCIFUL MEN, WHOSE RIGHTEOUSNESS HATH NOT BEEN FORGOTTEN.—THE PEOPLE WILL TELL OF THEIR WISDOM, AND THE CONGREGATION WILL SHOW FORTH THEIR PRAISE.

THE Author of this excellent book of morality, having deſcribed in the moſt energetic language the glory of the Deity as diſplayed in the works of the creation; having made many admirable obſervations upon human nature; having given us many uſeful precepts to regulate our conduct towards God and man, concludes his work with a panegyric upon ſome of the moſt eminent characters of his own nation.—"Let us now praiſe famous men."

THE praiſe of *famous men* has been a favourite ſubject with the poets and hiſtorians of all ages. The exploits of the warriour,

, and

and the wiſdom of the ſtateſman, are handed down to poſterity by the pens of their ſeveral panegyriſts. But amongſt the numbers who ſignalized themſelves in their day, how few in proportion have found an hiſtorian to record their actions. Men of the moſt ſplendid talents, learned, eloquent, brave, whoſe abilities commanded the reſpect of their contemporaries, and ſeemed to promiſe them everlaſting fame, are buried in the gulph of oblivion. " Such as did bear rule in their kingdoms, " men renowned for their power, giving counſel by their under- " ſtanding, leaders of the people by their counſels, and by their " knowledge of learning meet for the people, wiſe and eloquent " in their inſtructions: rich men furniſhed with ability, living " peaceably in their habitations: all theſe were honored in their " generations, and were the glory of their times.—There be of " them that have left a name behind them, that their praiſes " might be reported; and ſome there be, which have no me- " morial; who are periſhed as though they had never been; " and are become as though they had never been born; and " their children after them."

SUCH is the various fate of thoſe, whoſe celebrity has ariſen from great riches, eminent talents, or great power: but it fares otherwiſe with men of active benevolence, whoſe abilities have been exerted in promoting the happineſs of their fellow-creatures, whoſe riches have been employed in adminiſtering to their wants, to the wants of generations yet unborn. " Theſe were merciful men, *their* righteouſneſs hath not " been forgotten; *their* glory ſhall not be blotted out: their " bodies are buried in peace; but their name liveth for ever- " more.

" more. The people will tell of their wiſdom, the congregation
" will ſhow forth their praiſe."

We may obſerve two circumſtances in what the Son of Sirach ſays of theſe men; that they will be had in remembrance, and that they will be remembered with praiſe. Can we ſay as much of half the heroes whoſe exploits are handed down to us in hiſtory? We admire their valour, we give them credit for their abilities; but how often do we deteſt the motives of their actions, how often do we ſhudder at their conſequences. But, however the ill-natured part of the world may ſuſpect the benefactors of mankind of unworthy motives, (and none but the ill-natured will ſuſpect them,) yet all muſt agree in rejoicing at the happy effects which reſult from their beneficence. Their wealth and their labours having been employed in endeavouring to alleviate the miſeries that man is heir to, in adminiſtering medicines to the ſick, in checking the progreſs of epidemic malady, in procuring eaſe and retirement for the aged and infirm, in diffuſing knowledge to the ignorant, and reforming the wicked and ungodly; and in ſecuring theſe bleſſings even to diſtant poſterity—theſe men have ſurely a claim to the applauſe and gratitude of all ſucceeding ages.

When we ſee ſchools erected for the ſupport and inſtruction of thoſe children whom poverty would have kept in perpetual ignorance; when we ſee hoſpitals which the generoſity of our forefathers have founded, ſome ſerving as a temporary retreat for the ſick, and reſtoring them with renovated health to their diſtreſſed families; others yielding a laſting aſylum to age and poverty; it

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is impoſſible to avoid reflecting upon the benevolence of thoſe to whom we are indebted for theſe benefits. Each paſſing ſtranger, as he views the recording tablet, will pour forth bleſſings on the founder's name: theſe are themes of public gratitude, "The people will talk of the wiſdom of *ſuch* men, the "congregation will ſhow forth their praiſe."

UPON ſuch a ſubject it would be impoſſible to avoid mentioning the name of *COLSTON*, even if this day were not ſet apart for commemorating the various benefactions which owe their origin to his bounty. And, yet though the nature of the ſubject leads me to it, and though the particular object of this day's aſſembly makes it more eſpecially incumbent upon me to deſcribe his virtues, yet ſo well known is his character, ſo often have his good deeds been related, that he muſt be a ſtranger—to this place, ſhall I ſay? to this nation rather, to whom I can recount any thing that is unknown of *COLSTON*. There is ſcarcely a ſpecies of miſery incident to human nature, which he did not contribute to relieve, either by public foundations, or by private benefactions; and though this his * native place was with great propriety the principal ſcene of his benevolence, it was not confined to ſo narrow a ſphere, but extended itſelf wherever want and miſery were preſented to his view.

YET great and extenſive as were his charities, I have never heard him charged with oſtentation or vain parade: there were not wanting thoſe who would gladly have embraced an opportunity of caſting a ſlur over the reputation of ſo eminent

* Edward Colſton, Eſq; was born at Briſtol, November 2, 1636, O. S. He died at Mortlake in Surry, October 11, 1721. O. S.

a character; for, ſtrange as it may appear, he had enemies; yet by the teſtimony of his contemporaries he was a man of a modeſt and unaſſuming demeanor, and his ſecret alms are ſaid to have been as unlimited as his public benefactions.

It muſt have been frequently obſerved, and it is a circumſtance very much redounding to his honour, that by far the greater part of the money which he appropriated to charitable purpoſes was expended in his lifetime; when he was in health and vigor; near twenty years before he died. It was not a fit of terror occaſioned by reflecting upon the miſdeeds of a paſt life, that induced him to ſeek atonement at the cloſe thereof by ample legacies to the poor; it was not a ſudden picque, which ſheltering itſelf under the cloak of charity, deprived a relation of his juſt and equitable rights; it was a laudable zeal for the good of his fellow creatures, for the well-being of future generations, that prompted him while yet alive to part with the ſuperfluities of his wealth for ſuch noble purpoſes.

Meanwhile, with this extenſive generoſity his fortune ſeemed not to be impaired; like *the widow's cake and cruſe of oil*, it ſupplied the daily calls of charity without ſuffering any ſenſible diminution. That God, who delights in acts of benevolence, to whom mercy is more acceptable than ſacrifice, beſtowed ſuch a bleſſing upon his affairs, as enabled him, after expending * ſuch ample ſums upon charitable inſtitutions, to leave a ſplendid fortune to his relations.

* The ſums which he is known to have expended in public benefactions amount to between 70,000 and 80,000 l. He left above 100,000 l. to his relations.

To commemorate the virtue of ſuch a man, year after year to aſſemble to record his bounties, is a meaſure no leſs commendable than uſeful. It is uſeful in a double ſenſe; that thoſe who are the objects of his bounty, may be reminded of the benefits which they derive therefrom, and exhorted to make a proper uſe of them: and ſecondly, that from ſo eminent an example of benevolence and charity, thoſe who are bleſſed with the means of ſo doing, may be excited to emulate his virtues.

THAT I may endeavour in ſome degree to accompliſh ſo deſirable an end, let me firſt addreſs myſelf to you who derive ſuch manifold advantages from the bounty of that man, whoſe virtues we now commemorate.

YE, who advanced into the decline of life, enjoy a peaceful and comfortable retreat, let me exhort you to make that uſe of it which your worthy and beneficent founder had in view. Ere while you had not perhaps where to lay your heads; the cares of a family which ye were ill able to ſupport, the ſolicitude of providing for them that bread which their neceſſities demanded, and which your utmoſt efforts could ſcarce procure; the diſtraction of thought which a life of ſuch continual anxiety muſt occaſion, left you, I fear, but little time to attend to the concerns of religion. Now—after all the ſtorms and tempeſts which ye have encountered, on the ſea of life, ye are arrived at a peaceful and ſecure haven. Without an anxious thought for to-morrow's ſuſtenance, ye may eat your daily bread unearned with grateful hearts. Free from all care and ſolici-

tude, ye now may (and moſt highly incumbent is it upon you ſo to do) dedicate your thoughts to that world which muſt ſhortly be your abode for evermore. Spending the remainder of your days in harmony and brotherly love, may ye unite in daily praiſes and thankſgivings to God the giver and author of all good; and may ye prepare yourſelves for thoſe bliſsful regions where alone ye can inherit for ever the fulneſs of that reſt and peace which ye now enjoy.

Ye, who (through the liberality of your great benefactor) are now receiving your education in the principles of the Chriſtian religion, and in every branch of uſeful ſcience—*Ye* have the faireſt proſpects of this world's good, and that of the world to come, opened to your view. The benevolence of your founder has given you ſuch advantages, that it muſt be your own faults if you ever want the aſylum which *thoſe* objects of his bounty enjoy. The ſucceſs of his intentions, and of your hopes, muſt depend entirely upon your own conduct. If you are attentive and obedient to the inſtructions of your maſters, if you are diligent and induſtrious, and endeavour, to the beſt of your abilities, to learn what they appoint, and comply with the rules which they preſcribe to you; if, after you have quitted the roof under which you now are placed, you uſe the ſame induſtry and diligence in whatſoever employment is fixed upon for your future life, the path is open to riches and to eminence: but if you purſue a contrary conduct, and are ſlothful, negligent, and diſobedient, you never *can* arrive at ſuch eminence; but

but muſt be contented to paſs your lives in poverty, obſcurity, and diſgrace. But ſurely, if you have any ſparks of emulation in your breaſts, they muſt be kindled when you are told that there have been thoſe who, having occupied the places which you now fill, have attained to great eminence in their ſeveral vocations, who have enjoyed every advantage which riches can afford, and, to their credit be it ſpoken, who have ſhewn their gratitude to their benefactor by imitating his generoſity. May ye follow their examples, and when like them ye proſper, like them be grateful.

BEFORE I entirely quit the ſubject, permit me to ſay a few words as a general exhortation to that benevolence which we are now admiring and applauding.

FAR from having occaſion to reproach the preſent age, we may congratulate ourſelves that it is ſo well inclined to ſupport every charitable and uſeful project. Many are the excellent inſtitutions to which late years have given birth, unknown to, unthought of by our anceſtors. We have ſocieties ſupported by ample and munificent contributions, who relieve the impriſoned debtor, who give as it were a ſecond life to thoſe whom ſome fatal accident had doomed to an untimely grave, who educate the infant poor, and teach them to keep holy the ſabbath-day *, who have even undertaken the arduous taſk of reforming the dregs of the people, of reſcuing from the very

* The object of the Philanthropic Society, inſtituted in 1788, is to educate the children of vagrants and criminals.

abodes

abodes of iniquity thoſe children, whom example and evil counſel had already initiated into the moſt vicious practices, and whom they yet hope to make good ſervants of the king and uſeful members of the community. Though to give effect to theſe benevolent projects, it is not a *COLSTON* that ſtands forth; the united contributions and exertions of the many, accompliſh that, which we cannot expect frequently to find any *one* man both willing and able to undertake; and indeed, ſo ready are the generality of our countrymen to contribute to any thing that bears the name of charity, that we have ſeldom to lament the difficulty of procuring pecuniary ſupplies towards promoting any ſcheme that promiſes to be beneficial to the poor, or advantageous to the common intereſts of mankind.

STILL let us perſevere in theſe generous undertakings; let us not be *weary* of *well doing*; let not even the *failure* of a well-meant project diſcourage thoſe who ſincerely wiſh to benefit their fellow-creatures; never be that ſpirit of benevolence checked, which diffuſing itſelf through all ranks of people, does ſo much honour to this nation.

NOR does its credit reſt upon general character *alone*; there have not been wanting thoſe who ſtand forward upon the canvas. Whilſt Italy with reaſon boaſts of her * Borromeo; whilſt

* Cardinal Borromeo, archbiſhop of Milan, was born in 1538, and died in 1584. He was a man of the moſt unbounded charity: the public inſtitutions founded by him are ſo numerous that he may be accounted the moſt liberal benefactor recorded in the annals of any nation. His virtues are annually celebrated in all the churches of Milan.

* Marſeillies' good biſhop reflects honour upon France;—this nation has produced men, whoſe charity, whoſe active benevolence entitle them to the moſt diſtinguiſhed rank in the annals of fame. Inſpired by ſuch examples, may thoſe whom the liberal hand of Providence has marked out to be the benefactors of mankind, catch the ſacred enthuſiaſm; may they add freſh wreaths of glory to that country which has already given birth to † *KYRLE*, to *HOWARD*, and to *COLSTON!*

* Henry Francois Xavier de Belſunce, biſhop of Marſeilles. He not only continued in that city during the great plague in 1720 and 1721, but went from houſe to houſe adminiſtering both ſpiritual and temporal comforts to the ſick. He refuſed the rich biſhopric of Laon, becauſe he would not quit thoſe to whom he had ſo greatly endeared himſelf by his benevolence. He died at an advanced age in 1755.

† The celebrated *Man* of *Roſs*.

FINIS.